



## God Wants Me to be Happy, Healthy, and Wealthy.

Big Idea: God wants you to pursue him, not worldly comfort and possession.

Read the Bible:  
Matthew 6:19-34

### **STUDY**

\*\*\* Before interacting with this guide, all leaders should study the referenced texts using the HEAR Method. It's also important to encourage your group members to read the text using the HEAR Method. \*\*\*

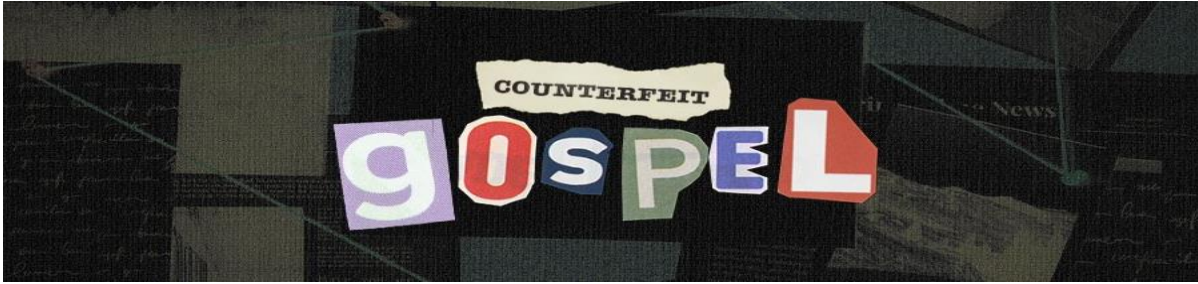
H: Highlight, or take note of, things in the passage that stick out to you as you read.

E: Explain what the passage means by asking simple questions of the text:

- **Why was this written?**
- **To whom was it originally written?**
- **How does it fit with the verses before and after it?**
- **Why did the Holy Spirit include this passage in the book?**
- **What is He intending to communicate through this text?**

A: Apply the text to your life. What does God want you to learn from this text?

R: Respond to God in prayer.



### Matthew 6:19–34 (ESV): Lay Up Treasures in Heaven

19 “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.  
21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

22 “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, 23 but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

24 “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

### Do Not Be Anxious

25 “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? 28 And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, 29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32 For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

34 “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.



## Summary

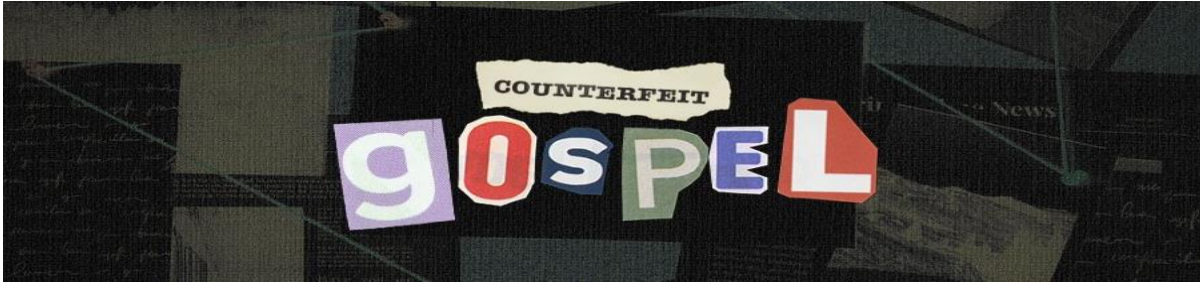
The promise of the world is often seductive to Christian exiles passing through. We know that this world is not our home. We know that we are simply hitch-hikers here on borrowed time and that the real joys are yet to come. However, if we are not careful, we can be sucked into believing that all the best things are not in the world to come, they are in the here and now. We can begin to believe, as one well known t.v. Pastor puts it, that we can have our, “best life now.”

In order to have our best life now, we have to move our trust around a little bit. Instead of trusting in Jesus to provide for us and take care of our needs and desires we need to trust in money and worldly resources. If we are going to have our best life now, we need to make sure that we get our hands on more money, better things, bigger pleasures. There is a subtle danger in pursuing these things as Christians. If we are not careful, we can start to believe that this is what God wants for us.

After all, doesn't God want me to be happy? After all, isn't it a sign of God's blessing on my life if he gives me material goods? Wouldn't a good God want me to be healthy, wealthy, and happy? Maybe, but maybe not.

Jesus reminds us in Matthew 6 that we are not to be people who seek or trust in material wealth. These kinds of pursuits are not the aim of the Christian life. Where the world may love to be healthy, wealthy, and happy, Christians live to store up a treasure that can never rot. Where the world seeks to have their best life now, Christians look to a life of unimaginable pleasure that will never ever end.

The truth is we know, and Christ makes clear, if you're living your best life now, you're heading for hell.



## **Leading Your Group**

### **Community Time**

Start group by asking for Prayer requests and checking in on everyone.

### **Bible Study**

\*\*\*Have everyone in your group read assigned scripture before meeting. \*\*\*

Start Group by Reading Matthew 6:19-34

### **Major Points**

#### **Point No. 1: Worldly possessions are good, but they are not eternal.**

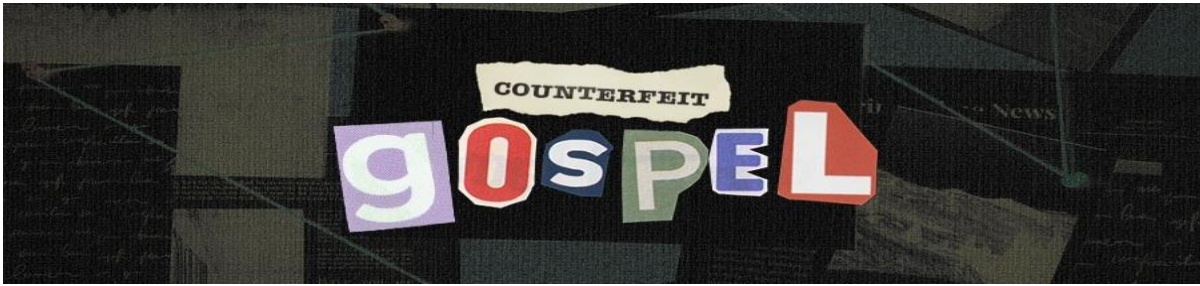
One of the main reasons that Christ is so serious about our eternal pursuits is that he doesn't want us to work for what will not last. Jesus points out what we all know but are so reluctant to think about. Everything we have on this earth will one day collect dust and fade away.

To make the matter even more real for us: there is not one thing that you own that will not one day find its way onto the shelves of a good will or the heaps of a garbage pile.

Everything here is fading. Jesus refuses to let us believe that what we can have here is able to satisfy our hearts for eternity,

#### **Discuss:**

How do you keep your desire for more in check in a world that abounds with materialism?



How do we balance the reality that all of this is fading away with the reality that we have to have stuff in the here and now?

## **Point No 2. You can't pursue Jesus and possession.**

Jesus elevates the stakes a little by telling us that this is a heart issue. You cannot have a heart that is set on pursuing possessions on earth and at the same time pursuing a life abandoned to him.

Christ is clear. We have to make a choice. Who are we going to serve?

This is not a matter of priority. This is a matter of masters. Are you serving God or money?

### **Discuss:**

What would it mean to live with money/ possessions as our master?

How do we know if we've let money or possessions become master in our life?

What are some practical ways that we can be sure that Jesus is master over our money?

## **Point No 3: If Jesus is our master, God will provide for us.**

Jesus doesn't leave us to fret about how we are going to make it in life if we decide to not make money and possessions our aim.

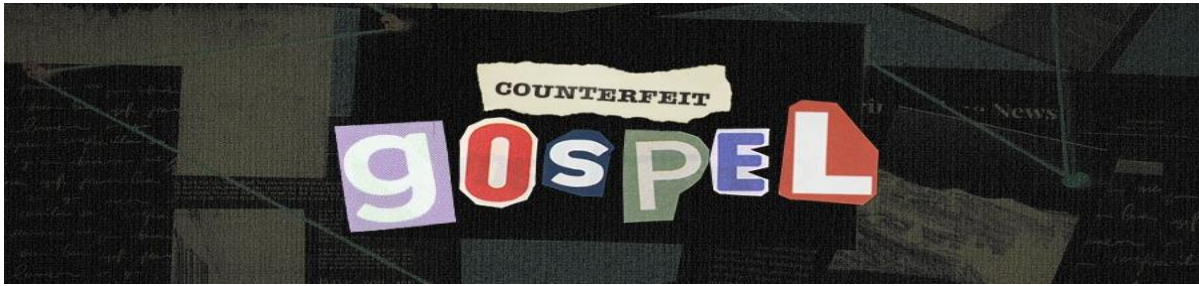
Let's face it: it can be scary to give up control and not make possessions, money and comfort our goal. If we don't take care of ourselves? Who will?

Our Father in Heaven will. Jesus is clear that ultimate provision comes not from our hands but Gods. He clothes the lilies of the field. Will he not clothe you?

### **Discuss:**

How can we learn to trust that God will provide for us?

Has there ever been a time where you've seen God provide in your life? How?



## Resources

### Expositor's Bible Commentary

**19** The present tense prohibition *mē thēsaurizete* could well be rendered “Stop storing up treasures” (Turner, *Syntax*, p. 76) rather than “Do not store up”; the time for a decisive break has come (similarly at v. 25).

The love of wealth is a great evil (1 Tim 6:10), calling forth frequent warnings. For heirs of the kingdom to hoard riches in the last days (James 5:2–3) is particularly shortsighted. Yet as with many of Jesus’ prohibitions in this sermon, it would be foolhardy so to absolutize this one that wealth itself becomes an evil (cf. Luke 14:12; John 4:21; 1 Peter 3:3–4; for other statements that cannot properly be absolutized). Elsewhere the Scriptures require a man to provide for his relatives (1 Tim 5:8), commend work and provision for the future (Prov 6:6–8), and encourage us to enjoy the good things the Creator has given us (1 Tim 4:3–4; 6:17). Jesus is concerned about selfishness in misplaced values. His disciples must not lay up treasure *for themselves*; they must honestly ask where their heart is (Mt 6:20–21).

This verse does not prohibit “being provident (making sensible provision for the future) but being covetous (like misers who hoard and materialists who always want more)” (Stott, p. 155). But it is folly to put oneself in the former category while acting and thinking in the latter (cf. France, “God and Mammon”).

The “treasures on earth” might be clothing that could be attacked by moths. Fashions changed little, and garments could be passed on. They could also deteriorate. “Rust” (*brōsis*) refers not only to the corrosion of metals but to the destruction effected by rats, mildew, and the like. Older commentaries often picture a farm being devoured by mice and other vermin. Less corruptible treasures could be stolen: thieves could break in (*dioryssousin*, “dig through,” referring to the mud brick walls of most first-century Palestinian homes) and steal.

**20–21** By contrast, the treasures in heaven are forever exempt from decay and theft (v. 20; cf. Luke 12:33). The words “treasures in heaven” go back to Jewish literature (M *Peah* 1:1; T Levi 13:5; Pss Sol 9:9). Here it refers to whatever is of good and eternal significance that comes out of what is done on earth. Doing righteous deeds, suffering for Christ’s sake, forgiving one another—all these have the promise of “reward” (see on 5:12; cf. 5:30, 46; 6:6, 18; 2 Cor 4:17). Other deeds of kindness also store up treasure in heaven (Matt 10:42; 25:40), including willingness to share (1 Tim 6:13–19).



In the best MSS the final aphorism (v. 21) reverts to second person singular (cf. vv. 2, 6, 17; see on 5:23). The point is that the things most highly treasured occupy the “heart,” the center of the personality, embracing mind, emotions, and will (cf. DNTT, 2:180–84); and thus the most cherished treasure subtly but infallible controls the whole person’s direction and values. “If honour is rated the highest good, then ambition must take complete charge of a man; if money then forthwith greed takes over the kingdom; if pleasure, then men will certainly degenerate into sheer self-indulgence” (Calvin). Conversely, those who set their minds on things above (Col 3:1–2), determining to live under kingdom norms, discover at last that their deeds follow them (Rev 14:13).

## 2) *Light* (6:22–23)

**22–23** “The eye is the lamp of the body” (v. 22) in the sense that through the eye the body finds its way. The eye lets in light, and so the whole body is illuminated. But bad eyes let in no light, and the body is in darkness (v. 23). The “light within you” seems ironic; those with bad eyes, who walk in darkness, think they have light, but this light is in reality darkness. The darkness is all the more terrible for failure to recognize it for what it is (cf. John 9:41).

This fairly straightforward description has metaphorical implications. The “eye” can be equivalent to the “heart.” The heart set on God so as to hold to his commands (Ps 119:10) is equivalent to the eye fastened on God’s law (Ps 119:18, 148; cf. 119:36–37). Similarly Jesus moves from “heart” (Mt 6:21) to “eye” (vv. 22–23). Moreover the text moves between physical description and metaphor by the words chosen for “good” and “bad.” *Haplous* (“good,” v. 22) and its cognates can mean either “single” (vs. *diploous*, “double,” 1 Tim 5:17) in the sense of “single, undivided loyalty” (cf. 1 Chronicles 29:17) or in cognate forms “generous,” “liberal” (cf. Rom 12:8; James 1:5). Likewise, *ponēros* (“bad,” v. 23) can mean “evil” (e.g., Rom 12:9) or in the Jewish idiomatic expression “the evil eye” can refer to miserliness and selfishness (cf. Prov 28:22). Jesus is therefore saying either (1) that the man who “divides his interest and tries to focus on both God and possessions ... has no clear vision, and will live without clear orientation or direction” (Filson)—an interpretation nicely compatible with Mt 6:24; or (2) that the man who is stingy and selfish cannot really see where he is going; he is morally and spiritually blind—an interpretation compatible with vv. 19–21. Either way, the early crossover to metaphor may account for the difficult language of v. 22.

At the physical level the “whole body” is just that, a body, of which the eye is the part that provides “light” (cf. R. Gundry, *Soma* [Cambridge: University Press, 1976], pp. 24–25). At the metaphorical level it represents the entire person who is plunged into moral darkness. The “light within you” is therefore the vision that the eye with divided loyalties provides, or the



attitude characterized by selfishness, in both cases it is darkness indeed. This approach, which depends on the OT and Jewish usage, is much to be preferred to the one that goes to Hellenistic literature and interprets “the light within you” in a neoplatonic sense (e.g., H.D. Betz, “Matthew vi.22f and ancient Greek theories of vision,” in Best and Wilson, pp. 43–56).

### 3) *Slavery* (6:24)

**24** “Jesus now explains that behind the choice between two treasures (where we lay them up) and two visions (where we fix our eyes) there lies the still more basic choice between two masters (whom we are going to serve)” (Stott, p. 158). “Money” renders Greek *mamōna* (“mammon”), itself a transliteration of Aramaic *māmōnā*’ (in the emphatic state; “wealth,” “property”). The root in both Aramaic and Hebrew (*’mn*) indicates that in which one has confidence; and the connection with money and wealth, well attested in Jewish literature (e.g., *Peah* 1:1; *b Berakoth* 61b; *M Aboth* 2:7; and not always in a negative sense), is painfully obvious. Here it is personified. Both God and Money are portrayed, not as employers, but as slave owners. A man may work for two employers; but since “single ownership and full time service are of the essence of slavery” (Tasker), he cannot serve two slave owners. Either God is served with a single-eyed devotion, or he is not served at all. Attempts at divided loyalty betray, not partial commitment to discipleship, but deep-seated commitment to idolatry.

### b. *Uncompromised trust* (6:25–34)

#### 1) *The principle* (6:25)

**25** “Therefore,” in the light of the alternatives set out (vv. 19–24) and assuming his disciples will make the right choices, Jesus goes on to prohibit worry. KJV’s “Take no thought” is deceptive in modern English, for Jesus himself demands that we think even about birds and flowers (vv. 26–30). “Do not worry” can be falsely absolutized by neglecting the limitations the context imposes and the curses on carelessness, apathy, indifference, laziness, and self-indulgence expressed elsewhere (cf. Carson, *Sermon on the Mount*, pp. 82–86; Stott, pp. 165–68). The point here is not to worry about the physical necessities, let alone the luxuries implied in the preceding verses, because such fretting suggests that our entire existence focuses on and is limited to such things. The argument is *a fortiori* (“how much more”) but not (contra Hill, *Matthew*) *a minori ad maius* (“from the lesser to the greater”) but the reverse: if God has given us life and a body, both admittedly more important than food and clothing, will he not also give us the





latter? Therefore fretting about such things betrays the loss of faith and the perversion of more valuable commitments (cf. Luke 10:41–42; Heb 13:5–6).<sup>1</sup>

## Tyndale New Testament Commentary

### *vi. Teaching on religious observance (6:1–18)*

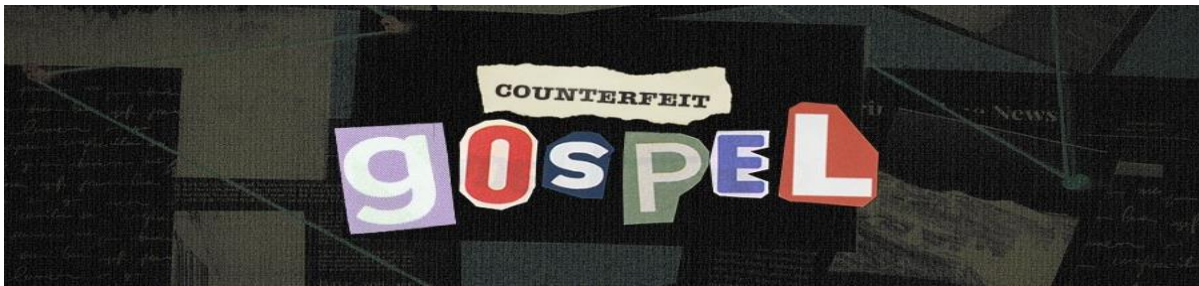
The ‘righteousness which exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees’ (5:20) is to be seen not only in a new radical approach to the legal and ethical questions which concerned the scribes (5:21–48), but in a new attitude to the scrupulous religious observance which was the hallmark of the Pharisees (6:1–18). The new attitude consists not in a repudiation of the main aspects of Jewish piety, but in an avoidance of ostentation in their performance. Religious observance is to be directed towards God, not to gaining the approval of men.

Almsgiving, prayer and fasting are selected as examples of religious observance. These three were (and are) the most prominent practical requirements for personal piety in mainstream Judaism (see Davies, pp. 307–315). The same three activities, together with the specifically Islamic requirements of the Hajj and recitation of the creed, constitute also the Five Pillars of Islam. Jesus accepts them as central also to the religious life of his disciples. They are treated in three passages of closely parallel structure (vv. 2–4, 5–6, 16–18), with a general introduction (v. 1); a long digression on prayer (vv. 7–15) interrupts the carefully balanced structure, and is perhaps an insertion by Matthew, made up of independent sayings of Jesus, into a characteristically memorable unit of Jesus’ teaching.

1. The overall theme of the section is stated simply, in words which superficially seem to conflict with 5:16. But what is condemned here is ostentation, particularly in the practice of religious duties. (*Piety* is a good translation for *dikaïosynē* (normally ‘righteousness’) in this context: it picks up the ‘righteousness’ of 5:20, but with special application to religious observance rather than to ethical obedience, and so acts as a general term to cover the specific references to almsgiving, prayer and fasting which follow.) The disciple’s life is inevitably, and rightly, public, but that does not entitle him to show off his religious devotion; there is a world of

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<sup>1</sup> D. A. Carson, “[Matthew](#),” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 177–179.



difference between living a conspicuously good and godly life (5:13–16) and striving to gain a reputation for piety. The difference lies not only in the motive, but in the result: the former brings glory to God, the latter only to the performer.

There is also a difference in *reward*. See on 5:12 for the concept of rewards, which recurs twice in each of the three subsections that follows (vv. 2, 4, 5, 6, 16, 18). The show-off gets what he has earned, the approval of men, and so misses the true *reward* which comes only from *your Father who is in heaven* (see on 5:16; this view of God dominates ch. 6 particularly).

2. Almsgiving was a religious duty, not a philanthropic option, in Judaism (cf. Deut. 15:7–11; Ps. 112:9) and by the first century AD poor relief based on such almsgiving was impressively well-organized. Jesus expects his disciples to give generously, but not conspicuously. *Sound no trumpet* is probably metaphorical for calling attention to oneself, as in other ancient literature, since no literal use of trumpets in connection with almsgiving is clearly attested. *Hypocrite* is a favourite word in Matthew, used particularly, as here and in vv. 5, 16, to characterize the Pharisees in their ostentatious piety. In chapter 23, it has become a stereotyped epithet for the scribes and Pharisees. The Greek word means originally an ‘actor’, and here that sense is not far from the surface: they are performing to an audience. It is this rather than any conscious insincerity which is the point of the word here, though elsewhere insincerity (22:18), or at least inconsistency between words and deeds (7:5; 15:7), is in view. The aim of such play-acting is *that they may be praised by men*, and in that praise it finds its full *reward* (*misthos*, literally ‘wages’, that which has been earned). *Have (apechō)* is a commercial term for receipt in full, and therefore implies there is no more to look forward to (cf. its use in Luke 6:24, and the similar *apolambanō* in Luke 16:25).

3–4. In contrast, the secrecy of the disciple’s almsgiving will result in a *reward* (not an earned remuneration, but the disproportionate return of God’s grace: see on 5:12), not from men, but from *your Father who (alone) sees in secret*. The stress is on the source (and therefore the quality) of the reward in comparison with the hypocrite’s ‘wages’, not on the manner of its giving, as in the late reading reflected in AV ‘openly’. The older text does not indicate that the Father’s reward is either public or even earthly.

5–6. The structure is closely parallel to vv. 2–4, and uses the same key words and phrases, on which see above. The prayers *in the synagogues* were led by a member who stood at the front; to be invited to do so was presumably a mark of distinction in the congregation. Prayer was not normally practised *at the street corners*, but Jeremias suggests that one who strictly observed the afternoon hour of prayer could deliberately time his movements to bring him to the most public place at the appropriate time (*NTT*, p. 187)! The disciple, by contrast, is to pray in the ‘storeroom’ (*tameion*; cf. Luke 12:24). This was an inner room, secluded, probably windowless, and possibly with the only lockable door in the house; it is thus proverbial for a secret place (Luke



12:3; cf. Matt. 24:26). The clause is modelled on Isaiah 26:20 (where *tameion* occurs in the LXX), as a prescription for hiding away. Jesus is not here forbidding public or communal prayer as such, but the ostentation to which it is too easily prone. The essence of prayer is the communion of the disciple with his Father.

**7–8.** The subject of prayer is expanded with other sayings—a warning against mechanical praying (vv. 7–8), the Lord’s Prayer (vv. 9–13), and a comment on it (vv. 14–15)—before the third part of the teaching on religious observance in vv. 16–18. The first saying is aimed not now against the ‘hypocrites’, but against praying *as the Gentiles do*. Prayer in the non-Jewish world was often characterized particularly by formal invocations and magical incantations, in which the correct repetition counted rather than the worshipper’s attitude or intention. *Heap up empty phrases* translates the Greek *battalogeō*, a word otherwise unknown in contemporary literature, and perhaps coined as an onomatopoeic term for empty ‘babbling’; its resemblance to the Hebrew *bāṭel* (‘vain, idle’) would sharpen the point. The stress is apparently on the quality rather than the quantity of the utterance. This is not a prohibition either of repetition in prayer (AV ‘vain repetitions’ is unwarranted; Jesus repeated himself, Matt. 26:44) or of set forms of prayer (vv. 9–13 go on to give one!), but of thoughtless, mechanical prayer. It is not *many words* that God responds to, but an attitude of prayerful dependence.

**9–13.** The Lord’s Prayer occurs in a shorter form in Luke 11:2–4; it is generally assumed that Matthew’s version represents the first stage of its expansion in Christian liturgical use, to be completed by the later addition of the doxology (see on v. 13), though there is no improbability in Lohmeyer’s view that Jesus taught the prayer in different forms on two separate occasions; the context in Luke is a specific request for instruction on how to pray, while in Matthew it is part of a more general discourse on the nature of prayer.

It has become fashionable in recent interpretation to take the Lord’s Prayer, even in the Lucan version, as primarily eschatological, concerned with the disciple’s longing for and preparation for the consummation of God’s kingdom. Practically every clause can be interpreted in that way. But the fact that Christians have used the prayer throughout the centuries without a specifically eschatological intention suggests that it also has an application to the disciple’s daily concerns (which should of course *include* the looking forward to God’s victory), even that this application is the primary one.

It is a prayer for *disciples*, who alone can call God ‘Father’. It is also a prayer for disciples *as a group* (all the first person pronouns are plural). This, together with its marked similarity to several Jewish liturgical prayers of the period (for examples see McNeile, p. 77), suggests that at least part of its purpose was a liturgical use in Christian worship. This does not exclude, however, its use also as a summary or model for our own prayer, both corporate and private, and its use in



this way has preserved many Christians from the self-centred approach which easily characterizes our prayer without such a model.

9. *Then* indicates that the following prayer is an expression of the understanding of God's fatherly care in v. 8, in contrast with the practice of the Gentiles (v. 7); an emphatic 'you' in the Greek points the contrast. The address 'Father' found in the Lucan version represents the bold 'Abba' which was a hallmark of Jesus' unique intimacy with God (Mark 14:36). The boldness is blunted in Matthew's *Our Father who art in heaven*, a more reverent formula found (unlike the simple 'Abba') in some Jewish prayers. This address does, however, express forcibly the tension in the disciples' attitude to God, who is at the same time *in heaven*, transcendent, all-powerful, the Lord of the universe and yet *Our Father*, concerned for the needs of each disciple, and entering into an intimate relationship with them.

Three parallel clauses follow, the first two closely echoing the synagogue prayer known as the *Qaddish*: 'Exalted and hallowed be his great name in the world which he created according to his will. May he let his kingdom rule in your lifetime ... speedily and soon.' *Hallowed be thy name* is asking for more than reverent speech. (*Hallow* means 'make holy', or better 'treat as holy, reverence', BAGD, p. 9a.) The *name* represents God himself as revealed to men (so frequently in the Old Testament, e.g. Deut. 28:58; Isa. 30:27). This clause may thus express both a desire to see God truly honoured as God in the world today, and an eschatological longing for the day when all men acknowledge God as the Lord.

10. *Thy kingdom come* is the most clearly eschatological clause in the prayer. It must at least include an aspiration for the final establishment of God's rule over all his creation (see pp. 48–50 for the idea of 'kingdom of God/heaven'). But in the ministry of Jesus the kingdom of God had in a sense already come (see on 3:2) and its progressive establishment no less than its final consummation should be the constant concern of disciples. Similarly *Thy will be done* can apply both to men's obedience to God's will in the world today (cf. the very personal use of the same phrase by Jesus in 26:42) and to the ultimate working out of God's purpose for the world. To view these three petitions as purely eschatological is to defuse one of the most demanding prayers disciples can be called on to offer, with far-reaching consequences for the daily conduct of their lives; to view them as purely ethical is to ignore the 'blessed hope' which is the mainspring of New Testament discipleship. The three clauses are rounded off with the phrase *on earth as it is in heaven*, which, in view of the careful balance of the three preceding clauses, is probably to be taken with all of them rather than as an extension of the last. It too allows the double application of these clauses, which have a fulfilment not only in the worship and harmony of heaven but also on earth, progressively as the consummation approaches and completely when it comes. The prayer embraces the whole scope of this outworking of God's purpose, but its focus is not on



either present or future, but on God himself, whose glory must be the disciples' first and deepest concern, before they consider their own needs.

**11.** The three clauses of prayer for God's glory are now balanced by three petitions for the disciples' needs. Material needs are represented by *our daily bread*, but the meaning of *daily* is uncertain. *Epiousios* occurs nowhere else except perhaps in a fragment of an Egyptian account book, published in the last century but since lost! Of the many suggested translations, based on different speculative etymologies, three seem possible. (a) 'For the day (in question)', hence *daily*, possibly with a reminiscence of the daily provision of manna in the wilderness. (b) 'Necessary' for survival, cf. Proverbs 30:8, 'feed me with the food that is needful for me'; in the account-book fragment it probably referred to a daily 'ration'. (c) 'For the coming day', which is currently the most favoured translation, supported by Jerome's report of this interpretation in an early Aramaic version of the Gospel. (a) and (b) come to much the same thing, a prayer for the day's material needs to be met. (c) could either carry a similar meaning, asking for tomorrow's food to be provided, or an eschatological sense 'food for the Coming Day', with reference to the expected Messianic banquet (see on 8:11). If the whole prayer is taken eschatologically, this last meaning seems required (see Jeremias, *NTT*, pp. 199–201). But the fact that this bread is required *today* (and still more the Lucan version, which asks for it 'each day') suggests that the thought is of daily provision, and if so it makes little difference whether the request is for today's or tomorrow's bread. Such a request is not in conflict with vv. 25ff., for it is the fact that these needs have been committed to God in prayer that makes anxiety unnecessary.

**12.** *Debts* represents the regular Aramaic term for sin, which literally denoted money debt, here put literally into Greek (Luke has the more ordinary term for 'sins', but retains the idea of debt in the second clause). The thought is of sins in general, as the explanation in vv. 14–15, using the very general term *trespass* (literally 'false step', i.e. wrongdoing), makes clear. *Have forgiven* seems clearly to be the correct text in Matthew, though many mss have substituted the present tense (used here by Luke) to avoid the implication that God's forgiving us depends on our prior forgiveness of others. In fact the Aramaic perfect, which probably lies behind Matthew's aorist tense, could be used with a present sense ('as *herewith* we forgive our debtors', Jeremias, *NTT*, p. 201), so that Luke's present is more idiomatically correct, Matthew's aorist more 'Semitic'. The point lies not in the time-sequence, but, as vv. 14–15 will explain, in the insincerity of a prayer for forgiveness from an unforgiving disciple.

**13.** After material provision and forgiveness for past sins comes a prayer, in two clauses, for protection from future sin. *Temptation* (*peirasmos*) is better 'testing' (cf. p. 101, above). God, while he does not 'tempt' men to do evil (Jas 1:13), does allow his children to pass through periods of testing. But disciples, aware of their weakness, should not desire such testing, and should pray to be spared exposure to situations in which they are vulnerable. If they do find



themselves in such a situation, however, they must pray to be *delivered from evil* (or ‘the Evil One’—as in 5:37 either translation is possible, and the sense is not greatly affected by the choice). The stress in both clauses is on the vulnerability of disciples and their consequent dependence on God for avoiding sin, though the ultimate threat of the eschatological conflict cannot be excluded from the prayer’s perspective.

The familiar doxology, which is absent from all texts of Luke, occurs in slightly varying forms in a good number of early mss and versions of Matthew at this point, but its absence from several of the most important early witnesses, representing the text of Matthew in use in various parts of the church from the second century, convinces most scholars that it was not in the original text (though in use very early and over a wide area). The prayer is likely to have been originally given and used with the form of a concluding doxology (an essential element in most Jewish prayers) left free, probably as a congregational response. The form we now know (modelled on 1 Chr. 29:11–12?) gradually became standardized as a part of the prayer itself, probably during the second century. Whether it, or something like it, goes back to the time of Jesus we cannot be sure. (For an unusually positive estimate see Davies, pp. 451–453.)

**14–15.** This comment on v. 12 adds little to what was implicit in the prayer itself. It in turn may be interpreted from 18:23–35, where the connection between our forgiving and being forgiven is graphically expounded. The point is not so much that forgiving is a prior condition of being forgiven, but that forgiveness cannot be a one-way process. Like all God’s gifts it brings responsibility; it must be passed on. To ask for forgiveness on any other basis is hypocrisy. There can be no question, of course, of our forgiving being in proportion to what we are forgiven, as 18:23–35 makes clear.

**16–18.** After the digression on prayer, the third example of religious observance is presented with the same structure and the same key words as vv. 2–4, 5–6 (see on vv. 2–4). Fasting was a prominent element in Jewish religious life, both at statutory times (Day of Atonement, and other prescribed fasts with historical significance) and occasionally, either by corporate or individual decision (see ‘Fasting’, *NBD*, p. 373). Strict Pharisees fasted at least twice a week (Luke 18:12), and made sure that others knew it. *Disfigure* (*aphanizō*) is literally ‘make invisible’ (it is translated ‘consume’ in vv. 19–20), a vivid expression for making unrecognizable, either by covering the head or by smearing with ash and dirt. In contrast, the disciple who fasts must look quite normal, clean and happy (anointing with oil was a common cosmetic, not necessarily a sign of special celebration: to put on a show of exceptional gaiety would be as ostentatious as the ‘hypocrites’!). Jesus assumes that fasting will continue to be practised among his disciples, as indeed it was, after his death (see further on 9:14–15; cf. Acts 13:2–3; 14:23).

### ***vii. The disciple’s attitude to material possessions (6:19–34)***



The last two long sections have presented Jesus' teaching largely in contrast with the teaching and practice of the scribes and Pharisees. Now in 6:19–7:12 there is a more direct and positive presentation of the true disciple's attitudes, the 'greater righteousness' which is going to make him conspicuous among other men. First a series of sayings which were apparently originally independent (their parallels are found in Luke 12:33–34; 11:34–35; 16:13; 12:22–31) are brought together into an impressive demand for detachment from material concerns, and for a prior loyalty to God.

**19–20.** The contrast between earthly and heavenly reward in vv. 1–18 leads naturally to this memorable poetic saying contrasting earthly and heavenly treasure. The use of similar language in 19:21 might suggest that the thought is specifically of almsgiving (cf. Luke 16:9 for the idea of using money with a view to a reward in heaven), but the scope here may also be wider. *Treasures in heaven* are 'stored up' by obedience to God in all areas of life; they are the reward of the disciple who puts God first. *Treasures on earth* give no permanent security or satisfaction; they can be destroyed by *moths* and other vermin (*brōsis*, a general term for 'eating', probably refers to damage by rats, woodworm, etc., rather than to *rust* [Gk. *ios*]), and removed by *thieves*.

**21.** It is not so much the disciple's wealth that Jesus is concerned with as his loyalty. As v. 24 will make explicit, materialism is in direct conflict with loyalty to God. And the danger of amassing possessions is that the *treasure* will command the disciple's loyalty, that material affluence will breed materialism.

**22–23.** This enigmatic saying is included here to reinforce the message of both vv. 19–21 and v. 24, the call for an undivided loyalty to God. *The eye is the lamp of the body* either in that it is the 'window' through which light enters the body (hence RSV *full of light, full of darkness*, for the adjectives 'light' and 'dark') or, more probably, in that it enables the body to find its way. In either case its effectiveness depends on its being *sound* (*haplous*). *Haplous* is literally 'single', but is used in the LXX to translate the root *tm*, 'complete', 'perfect', which is often used of 'undivided' loyalty. So the 'single eye' is primarily a metaphor for a life totally devoted to the service of God. But *haplotēs* is also used in the New Testament with a connotation of generosity (Rom. 12:8; 2 Cor. 8:2; 9:11, 13; cf. Jas 1:5) and such a nuance here is suggested by the contrasting 'evil eye' (RSV *not sound*), a regular expression not only for jealousy but for niggardliness (e.g. Deut. 15:9; Prov. 22:9; Matt. 20:15, and often in Jewish literature). There seems to be a deliberate *doublē-entendre* here, with *haplous* taking up not only the theme of undivided loyalty but also that of detachment from material concern, hence of generosity. The two themes intertwine throughout this section.

The result of such a *sound eye* is a well-illuminated *body*. The body here represents the whole person, and if the idea of the lamp was of that which enables the body to find its way, the thought is of a purposeful life, directed towards its true goal. The alternative is a life in the dark, like a blind man, because the 'evil eye' of selfish materialism gives no light to show the way.



24. *Serve* is literally ‘be a slave of’; a man could satisfactorily have two employers, but not two owners. So the same theme of undivided loyalty is stressed again. *Hate* here, as often in the Bible, carries a comparative sense, not necessarily of active dislike so much as of displacement by a higher loyalty (cf. on 5:43). The rival owner is *mammon*, Aramaic *māmōnā*, which means essentially ‘possessions’. It was not a personal name (as Milton makes it, drawing on its ‘personification’ in this passage). While it sometimes carried the connotation of wealth wrongly acquired, this is usually indicated in the Targums by the addition of *dišēqar* (‘of falsehood’; cf. Luke 16:9, 11). *Māmōnā* alone is more neutral, as in the Targum to Proverbs 3:9, ‘Honour God with your mammon’ or even the Palestinian Targums to Deuteronomy 6:5, ‘You shall love Yahweh your God with ... all your mammon’. The same neutral connotation is found at Qumran and in the Mishnah. The rival loyalty then is not that of ill-gotten gains, but of material possessions however legitimate. They can be used to serve God, but they can also themselves claim a man’s allegiance. *Mammon* thus here represents the principle of materialism, and this is in direct conflict with loyalty to God.

25. The remainder of the chapter deals with ‘anxiety’. *Merimnaō* (‘to be anxious’) refers essentially to a state of mind (‘be overconcerned about’, *AB*). This will no doubt be revealed in frenzied activity, but Jesus’ focus is primarily on the mental attitude rather than its practical outworking (*pace* Jeremias, *PJ*, pp. 214–215), for it is here that the conflict with faith arises. To forbid ‘anxiety’ does not rule out a responsible concern and provision for one’s own and others’ material needs, nor does Jesus here forbid us to work (see on v. 26). His concern, as in the preceding verses, is with priorities, and the essential message of this passage is ‘First things first’, which means in fact ‘God first’. Given that prior emphasis, concern for material needs will not be able to usurp the first place which it too often occupies in a disciple’s interests. The objects of our anxiety, food, drink and clothing, are to be seen as less important than the *life* and the *body* which they supply, and subsequent verses will draw out the moral that, since God provides the latter, he can be trusted for the former. The two concerns of this verse, food and clothing, will be picked up respectively in the illustrations from nature in vv. 26 and 28.

26. If this light-hearted illustration were pressed too literally, it might suggest that the disciple has no need to grow and harvest food. But the point is that God sees that even the birds are fed, and a disciple is more valuable to him than a bird. What is prohibited is worry, not work. Even the birds have to spend a lot of energy in hunting or searching for their food, but the point is that it is there to be found. And it is provided by *your heavenly Father*; a true understanding of that phrase is the ultimate antidote to anxiety.

27. Anxiety in any case achieves nothing. It cannot add even a little time to our life-span. (Indeed it may shorten it!) *Hēlikia* normally means ‘age’, ‘life-span’. In Luke 19:3 it clearly means ‘height’, and the fact that *cubit* is a measure of physical length apparently supports this meaning





here (so AV, RV, NEB and some other versions). But a cubit (46 cm) would not be a slight (or even desirable?) addition to a man's height, as the context here seems to require, and Luke 12:26 demands. For a similar linear measure applied to length of life cf. Psalm 39:5, and indeed our 'life-span'.

**28–30.** This second illustration parallel to v. 26 is again not to be pressed into a recommendation of passivity and idleness, but is another argument from the less to the greater to indicate God's care for his children. The *lilies* should probably not be identified with a single species, as they are taken up in v. 30 as *grass*, the dead weeds used as fuel for an *oven*. It is wild vegetation in general which shows the prodigality of God's provision for the adornment of his creation, and thus forbids anxiety about our own clothing. Such anxiety indicates *little faith*, a word used elsewhere in Matthew for the disciples when they failed to trust Jesus in a situation of physical need (8:26; 14:31; 16:8; 17:20). Faith is, for Matthew, a very practical reliance on the care and power of the Father and of Jesus (cf. 8:8–10; 9:2, 21–22, 28–29; etc.). Anxiety is therefore its opposite, and is ruled out for the disciple.

**31–32.** A primary concern with material needs is characteristic of *the Gentiles*. As in 5:47; 6:7, the word seems to be used to make not so much a racial as a religious distinction; they are men without God. Such men have no knowledge of a *heavenly Father*, and so they have no antidote to anxiety and a consequent materialism in their outlook. The disciple by contrast realizes that his Father *knows that you need them all*, and his faith assures him that he both can and will provide them. As in vv. 7–8 this awareness is the basis for an attitude in striking contrast with the 'Gentile', who not only worries himself but worries his gods by his aggressive and unbelieving prayer.

**33.** This verse is the climax of vv. 25ff. Instead of emphasizing the negative ('Do not be anxious') it now sets out the positive attitude required of disciples, without which they will inevitably be subject to anxiety. They are to direct their attention consistently (*seek* is present imperative, implying a continuing obligation) towards *his kingdom and his righteousness*. For 'kingdom of God/heaven', see pp. 48–49, above; here the primary emphasis is on submission to God's sovereignty here and now, i.e. obedience to his will, though the idea of looking forward to, and working for, the ultimate establishment of his kingdom cannot be ruled out. Similarly *his righteousness* (which is absent from the parallel in Luke 12:31, but serves here to focus Matthew's special concern with practical discipleship) will refer, as in 5:6, 10, 20, to the kind of life which God requires in the present age, rather than to his ultimate act of 'vindication' or 'salvation'. What this verse demands is, therefore, a commitment to find and to do the will of God, to ally oneself totally with his purpose. And this commitment must come *first*. It is not to be crowded out by material concerns. Moreover, we are assured that if we thus put God first, our



material needs (*all these things*, echoing v. 32) will be provided. Material concern is therefore not only distracting, but unnecessary.

This positive climax makes it clear that vv. 25ff. are not prescribing an irresponsible, happy-go-lucky optimism, or a fatalistic acceptance of the *status quo*, nor are they decrying the body and its concerns as sordid and unworthy of our attention. They call the disciple to an undistracted pursuit of his true goal, to which lesser (though legitimate) concerns must give way; and they assure him that if he will put first things first, God will take care of the rest.

**34.** While the call not to *be anxious* links this verse with what precedes, its theme is rather different in that it deals with *trouble* ahead, while vv. 25–33 envisaged full provision, not trouble. It is a salutary reminder that God's sure provision of our needs does not guarantee a life without problems. But they need not be multiplied by worrying about them before they occur; God knows about these too, and can be trusted to deal with them when the time comes. Cf. James 4:13–15.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> R. T. France, [\*Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary\*](#), vol. 1 of *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 135–146.